

Thanking the Vice-Chancellor

At the UWI Toronto Gala February 2010

Mr. Chairperson,

It is my very pleasant duty to thank the Vice-Chancellor on behalf of my 6 colleagues for the awards he has just given us. But before I do that I wish to personally thank the University of the West Indies for what it did for me. 59 years ago I arrived at Mona, a Guyanese of robustly continental outlook. At the end of my four years at Mona I had become an equally robust West Indian regionalist and Guyana had become for me a West Indian island surrounded on three sides by land. That conviction has stayed with me all these years.

As students we were taught well by our academics, some of them leaving a life-lasting impression on us. But more fundamentally we educated one another, an achievement made possible by the totally residential nature of UCWI in the 1950s. Most potent of all the forms of mutual enlightenment were the late-night or weekend spontaneous talk sessions, irreverently known "ST". Our hunger for exploring the world of ideas made them necessary. Our irreverence made them fun. And their openness to students of all faculties made them intellectually spacious and invigorating.

At the end of our time at Mona we either felt the call to transform West Indian society. Or to test our mettle in the advanced societies of North America or Europe. Or throw our lot in with the newly independent, or about to be independent, countries of Africa and elsewhere. One thing was clear: being at

UCWI (as it was then) had made many of us confidently audacious.

But let us come back to the present. The seven of us, recipients of the Vice-Chancellor's Award, have been chosen as representatives of the significant achievements the Caribbean diaspora has made and is making in Canada. Three of us are of the UWI mould, with medical research, diplomacy cum journalism, and community building as our trade marks. Four of us are in such areas as politics cum education, creative writing and music making. All of us tremendously applaud the Vice Chancellor's use of his many talents to enhance the resources and strengthen the usefulness of UWI to the West Indies.

Under his watch, the university has found, and is finding, all kinds of ways to reach out to the people of the region and be of crucial service to them. As a result, UWI's presence is now ubiquitous and its impact clearly visible. People of many layers of West Indian society are now seeing it as "their university" and benefiting from its services.

Never was this more dramatically demonstrated than in Grenada in the aftermath of hurricane Ivan in 2004. It wasn't assistance from the North that led the response. The Vice Chancellor quickly assembled and dispatched a team of doctors, engineers, psychologists, and other relevant experts to the island to lead the process of reconstruction and the healing of its inhabitants. Fittingly, every one of those professionals was a graduate of UWI, bringing a wealth of understanding, expertise and insightful compassion to the

people of the stricken island.

The motto of UWI – *oriens ex occidente lux*- means light rising in the West, originally meaning The West Indies. These days that glow is global and tonight the spotlight is on the North. This gala therefore unites Canada and the Caribbean in a dramatic way and for a common purpose. The drama lies in the splendour of this evening's event. The common purpose is twofold: first, to deepen our appreciation, both financial and attitudinal, of the University of the West Indies and its many-sided services in support of Caribbean development. Second, to illuminate the seminal contribution that West Indians, whether products of UWI or not, have been making to the fascinating evolution of Canadian life and culture. Fusing Canadian verities with Caribbean insights and Caribbean verities with Canadian insights is in step with the globalisation of the planet.

The Vice-Chancellor has formulated a practical vision of what UWI and the West Indies can be in this fast-changing world. Gifted with insight and foresight, with sharp perception and clear projection, he possesses that enviable talent of crafting creative solutions out of sturdily opposite ways of thinking. He deserves our full support. For our part we, all of us here, should look forward to assisting the UWI to meet its challenges in ways that will be of tremendous benefit to the Caribbean region and beyond it.

Robert J. Moore

Ottawa, February 2010

